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Laos: Government airfield attacked

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*Vietnam: (Information as of 4:30 AM EST)

North Vietnamese Political Developments: Hanoi appears to be making a concerted effort to underscore the DRV foreign minister's 28 January statement which hinted that Hanoi might be willing to talk with US officials if the air strikes on North Vietnam were stopped.

In an unusual move the day the statement was broadcast, the DRV Foreign Ministry called in the heads of all diplomatic missions and read the text to them. Although the foreign minister's statement did not promise any specific Hanoi response to a cessation of the bombings, the tone was clearly intended to imply a positive action on Hanoi's part.

Peking-Hanoi Relations: Peking's virulent anti-Soviet campaign, which has included demonstrations by Chinese students at Soviet embassies in several countries, has spread to Hanoi.

Chinese students and diplomats staged demonstrations this week at the gates of the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi. Ignoring North Vietnamese sensibilities, Peking on 31 January publicized the incidents. Hanoi would undoubtedly prefer that no such demonstrations occur in North Vietnam, since it has traditionally attempted to keep Sino-Soviet frictions from intruding on its own war.

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Vietnamese officials have openly expressed distaste and contempt recently for the Chinese cultural revolution, using such words as "silly," "incomprehensible," and "stupid."

South Vietnamese Political Developments: There are signs of growing preoccupation in Saigon with the question of possible presidential candidates and political alliances.

(continued)

One of the most frequently mentioned "civilian" possibilities, retired southern general Tran Van Don, recently told a US Embassy officer that he would not be a candidate. Don, who played a prominent role in the coup which overthrew the Diem government, claimed that he could not hope to compete against present military leaders with their extensive financial and military support. He said that he expected both General Thieu and General Ky to run, and that he would back Ky in such a case.

There is evidence, however, that Don has recently been feeling out his potential support, and the US Embassy believes that he does have political ambitions. His recent remarks could reflect his assessment that he has little chance of winning the presidential race, and may now be thinking in terms of swinging his limited support to Premier Ky in return for a position in the future elected government.

South Vietnamese Military Developments: There has been no significant military action in South Vietnam in the past 24 hours.

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West Germany - Eastern Europe: Bonn is moving quickly to negotiate agreements with Hungary and Bulgaria similar to the one it reached with Rumania.

The West Germans and Hungarians have already agreed in principle to establish diplomatic relations,

[redacted] Details are to be worked out at a round of talks tentatively set for mid-February in Bonn. If the talks are successful, the Hungarian foreign minister will visit Bonn in March, at which time a formal announcement will be made.

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Discussions with Bulgaria are in a preliminary stage but German officials are optimistic about their outcome. In the interim, the Bulgarian foreign trade minister is expected to visit Germany.

These moves to "normalize" Bonn's relations with Eastern Europe are alarming East Germany. Moscow has sought to allay Pankow's fears by issuing a statement on 28 January supporting the East German regime on its terms for settling the German problem. It is not likely, however, to do anything to frustrate Bonn's diplomatic efforts.

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NOTES

Spain: Strikes and student demonstrations, both accompanied by violence, have broken out in Madrid, Barcelona, and Bilbao. For the first time there has been some collaboration between workers and students. The disorders could generate repressive measures and strengthen the hand of conservative elements in the regime, who oppose liberalization of the labor law. The law is scheduled for revision under Franco's constitutional reform program.

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*Laos: The Communists launched a sharp mortar and small arms attack against a government airfield at Luang Prabang in the early morning hours of 2 February destroying or badly damaging nine T-28 aircraft and three helicopters. Friendly casualties were five killed and six wounded, while no losses were reported to the 30-man enemy force. The attack apparently was designed to help neutralize the government's air support capability in northern Laos which has been a major factor in frustrating a renewed enemy effort to drive government guerrillas from Communist-held areas.

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